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ABSTRACT

This ERIC Digest discusses how, by studying Japan, the larger context of the Asia-Pacific region can be explored and students can be introduced to current realities. The top 5 competitive countries for 1994 were the United States, Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, and Germany. Because of the increasing interdependence between the United States and Japan, and Japan's place as an important part of Asia-Pacific dynamism, it is imperative that U.S. students increase their knowledge and understanding of Japan. The study of Japan has important multicultural dimensions. Mutual understanding continues to be illusive because attempts to examine aspects of Japanese culture sometimes result in exchanging one stereotype for another. What is needed is an exploration of the historical, economic, geographic, and sociological reasons behind what seems to be a propensity for group orientation. Suggested strategies for teaching about Japan while ensuring cultural accuracy include: (1) utilizing multiple perspectives; (2) including historical context; (3) involving Japanese nationals and other community resource persons; (4) exploring the underlying values of the culture; (5) considering introducing the Japanese language; and (6) introducing contemporary topics. Two resources for teaching about Japan are discussed: (1) the National Clearinghouse for U.S.-Japan Studies; and (2) the Center for Educational Media (CEM). Also included is information on obtaining resources from the ERIC system. Contains a 9-item reference list. (DK)

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Ideas for Integrating Japan into the Curriculum

by Linda S. Wojtan

Together, Japan and the United States comprise 40% of the world's gross national product (GNP). Additionally, these two countries dispense almost 40% of the world's foreign aid. Given these statistics, it is imperative that Americans increase their knowledge and understanding of Japan.

The Case for Teaching about Japan. The current ascendance of the Asia-Pacific region confirms the old prognostication that the Pacific would be the ocean of the future. We are, indeed, in the age of the Pacific. Further, Japan is a pre-eminent nation in the region and a harbinger of future developments. Through Japan, the larger context of the Asia-Pacific region can be explored and students can be introduced to current realities.

• **Japan is an important part of Asia-Pacific dynamism.** This fact cannot be overstated. Reports confirm that during the past decade, air-traffic growth in Asia has outpaced the rest of the world. Further, this trend is fully expected to continue for at least the next ten years. Additionally, the 14th annual global survey, "World Competitive Report," of the Geneva-based World Economic Forum only underscores the economic dynamism suggested above. The top five competitive countries for 1994 are the U. S., Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, and Germany.

• **Japan and the U.S. are increasingly interdependent.** Perhaps the most dramatic examples of interdependence are seen in the automobile industry, where joint ventures and overseas manufacturing have created an intricate web. The volume and importance of trade in this industry were recently underscored with the startling pronouncement that every time the dollar falls by one yen, Toyota loses 10 billion yen, or $96.2 million in profits! Interdependence will continue to grow in the political realm where Japan has been an ally of the U.S. for the past four decades.

• **The study of Japan has important multicultural dimensions.** U.S. census data for 1990 show that the Asian/Pacific Islander category grew by 108% to nearly 7.3 million. Within this category, the Chinese, Filipinos, and Japanese still rank as the largest Asian groups, with Japanese showing an increase of over 20%. Projections indicate that by the year 2020, the number of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the U. S. will swell to 22.6 million, or almost 7% of the U.S. population. Also, the proliferation of Japanese companies in the U.S. has resulted in numerous "corporate sojourners," Japanese nationals, usually here for a set number of years. As a result, numerous school systems are calling for increased study of Japan in order to facilitate cross-cultural understanding and many are offering a Japanese language course.

• **Mutual understanding continues to be illusive.** Attempts to examine aspects of Japanese culture sometimes simply result in the exchange of one stereotype for another. Japanese society is too often labelled as a group-oriented society and simply juxtaposed against the individual-oriented U.S. culture. What is needed is an exploration of the historical, economic, geographic, and sociological reasons behind what seems to be a propensity for group orientation. Unfortunately, many textbooks continue to present a facile interpretation of this and other aspects of Japanese culture.

Strategies for Teaching about Japan. Teaching about Japan can be appropriate at every level of the curriculum and in virtually every subject. The suggested strategies below can help ensure cultural accuracy when teaching about Japan.

• **Utilize multiple perspectives.** To a large extent, the U.S. media typically present only the U.S. perspective or approach to many aspects of U.S.-Japan relations. A study of Japan affords an excellent opportunity for the examination of complex issues in a multi-faceted fashion. Japan-produced sources, as well as Japanese nationals, can help to provide these multiple perspectives. Additionally, recently published curriculum materials, such as those focused on the World War II period (or the War in the Pacific, from another perspective) provide multiple perspectives through the creative use of primary source materials and engaging pedagogical strategies.

• **Include the historical context.** Both Japan and the U. S. have a national historical consciousness of past events, and these often differ markedly. These historical perspectives often influence contemporary concerns such as trade and diplomatic relations. U.S. textbooks inevitably herald the coming of Perry to Japan. The good Commodore is credited with "the opening of Japan." Most U.S. textbooks then go on to extol the virtues of increased trade. Japanese textbooks, however, stress that raw silk production at that time could not match market demands. Domestic shortages and rice hoarding ensued. Soon traders cornered the market and prices rose dramatically. Domestic economic chaos resulted. Clearly, two very different histories are presented here.

• **Involve Japanese nationals and other community resource persons.** One of the best ways to help ensure authenticity in cultural exploration is the involvement of nationals from the culture under study. This strategy is especially useful when teaching about Japanese culture. Japanese nationals can not only excite students about the culture, but they can also correct stereotypes or misinformation that might be present in print or audio-visual instructional materials.

• **Explore the underlying values of the culture.** Japan provides an ideal example of a culture that is superficially familiar, but fundamentally different. Outward examples of modernization, and at times westernization, such as pop culture

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and fast food are immediately familiar to students. Beyond this veneer, however, is a modern culture undergirded by Shinto, Buddhist, and Confucian values. An exploration of these values affords clues to a modernization scheme different from our own western model. Much has been written about the Japanese educational system, but too often the values inherent in the system are not explicated. We hear that Japanese children greatly respect their teachers and that, in general, respect for learning is fostered. What is the importance of this value later in life and how does it manifest itself? Japan has one of the highest literacy rates in the world and a reputation for both life-long learning and the painstaking collection of data.

• **Consider introducing the Japanese language.** Few students learn that other languages employ different alphabets, let alone syllabaries or ideographs. There are a number of useful introductory units in the Japanese language. Beyond training students in proper pronunciation, these materials use the Japanese language to reflect historical realities. Chinese influence is seen in kanji (the ideographs or characters), and western impact is seen in the use of romaji (Roman characters or western alphabets), as well as the katakana syllabary for foreign words. But perhaps the greatest reward gained is demystification of the Japanese language. Most students have no idea how to even approach the Japanese language. Its written form is sometimes described as "chicken scratch," and its sounds are relegated to the realm of meaningless babble. It is difficult to understand, let alone respect, a culture that seems to have an entirely meaningless method of communication. Taking some time to explicate the language will reap rich rewards in later lessons.

• **Introduce contemporary topics.** It is essential that print and audio-visual instructional materials be constantly updated with contemporary images. Further, a balance should be struck between the traditional and the current. For example, reading materials can be enriched with the inclusion of children's literature on Japan. Care should be taken, however, that the selections are not limited to folktales. A steady diet of folktales can lead to the misperception that all foreign cultures are quite bizarre and locked in a time warp.

Helpful Resources for Teaching about Japan. One of the most exciting developments in the K-12 curriculum field is the increased number of resources currently available. Two of the most comprehensive are highlighted here.

• **The National Clearinghouse for U. S.-Japan Studies** provides a variety of services and products to anyone interested in teaching and learning about Japanese culture and society, and about U.S.-Japan interrelationships. The foundation for all Clearinghouse activities is a computer-searchable database of materials that are useful to classroom teachers and curriculum planners. The Clearinghouse publishes useful books, in association with the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education (ERIC/ChESS). Additionally, the Clearinghouse distributes a complimentary newsletter, *SHINBUN-USA* and a Digest series. Information about the Digests and the Clearinghouse can be obtained through its toll-free telephone number, 800/266-3815.

• **The Center for Educational Media (CEM)** has established an on-going, up-to-date database of information on educational media materials related to Japan. With more than 800 entries of audio-visual materials, CEM will provide information from the database, including a list with the titles, brief synopses, intended audience levels, and where and how the materials can be obtained. Additionally, Learning Packages currently being developed will include suggestions for media materials and their usage. For more information contact: Center for Educational Media, Institute for Education on Japan, Earlham College, Richmond, IN 47474-4095; telephone (317) 983-1288; FAX (317) 983-1553.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia, 22153-2842; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, announced monthly in the CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from the UMI reprint service.

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